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## **News Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Friday, April 18, 2008

### **43 people indicted for their role in marriage fraud operation**

Forty-three individuals were charged this week in federal court with one count of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud in connection with a marriage fraud operation centered in the Twin Cities. The operation allegedly involved the recruitment of United States citizens to enter into fraudulent marriages with Chinese nationals in order for the Chinese nationals to obtain visas and other immigration benefits.

The indictment against the 43 defendants, which was unsealed today following the arrests of 20 of them on April 17-18, was filed on April 15. It alleges that between 2002 and November 2007 the defendants did knowingly conspire with each other and others to enter into marriages between Chinese citizens and U.S. citizens for the purpose of evading U.S. immigration laws. The 20 defendants arrested made their initial appearances April 17-18.

“ICE and our law enforcement partners aggressively target organizations that perpetrate immigration fraud because they compromise the integrity of our legal immigration system,” said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Investigations in Bloomington. “Our mandate is to identify and close vulnerabilities.”

Two of the men who allegedly arranged these fraudulent marriages have already pleaded guilty. Houa Vang, 23, St. Paul, pleaded guilty last month, and Le Guo Wu, 31, Philadelphia, Penn., pleaded guilty in February. Both pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to profit financially from arranging, facilitating and participating in fraudulent marriages.

The 20 defendants who appeared in federal court are: Nou Chang, 24, St. Paul; Mingwen Yang, 26, unknown address; Kaneeka Chanthavong, 25, Brooklyn Park; Vang Her, 25, St. Paul; Andmire Kissluv Lee, 28, St. Paul; Chee Chengshua Lee, 24, Brooklyn Center; Chue Dou Vang, 29, Mankato; David Ku Vang, 29, Maplewood; Pao Vang, 24, St. Paul; Falamena Vue, 21, St. Paul; Annie Pafoua Xiong, 23, Oakdale; Tou Kao Xiong, 23, Fridley; Toua Xiong, 26, St. Paul; Cheng Yang, 27, South St. Paul; Chue Yang, 24, St. Paul; Joe Yang, 27, Minneapolis; Koua Yang, 21, St. Paul; Lyfoung Yang, 26, Brooklyn Center; Thomas Yang, 25, Walnut Grove; and Tou Kao Yang, 26, Brooklyn Park.

The other 23 defendants indicted are: Mei Chen, 22, unknown address; Xiu Ying Chen, 21, unknown address; Xiuying Chen, 21, unknown address; Ying Chen, 24, unknown address; Yulu Chen, 23, unknown address; Huizhu Huang, 21, unknown address; Ling Huang, 22, unknown address; Mei Xia Huang, 21, unknown address; Caimin Li, 24, unknown address; Guangping Lin, 29, unknown address; Jianyun Lin, 23, unknown address; Feicui Liu, 21, unknown address; Jinlan Liu, 22, unknown address; Meiyun Liu, 20, unknown address; Yanjin Liu, 20, unknown address; Xiao Yan Lu, 22, unknown address; Yanxia Teng, 23, unknown address; Kao Vang, 27, St. Paul; Soua Vang, 27, Woodbury; Xiangquan Wang, 28, unknown address; Fen Yang, 23, unknown address; Lian Zhu Ye, 24, unknown address; and Jing Zhao, 22, unknown address.

Thirty-nine of the defendants were also charged with one count of aiding and abetting marriage fraud and four were also charged with one count of aiding and abetting visa fraud.

The indictment alleges that the object of the conspiracy was to facilitate entry into and residence within the U.S. by Chinese nationals (the beneficiaries) through fraudulent marriages to U.S. citizens (the petitioners).

The petitioners would travel to China on one or more occasions to facilitate the unlawful entry of the Chinese nationals into the U.S. The indictment alleges that the petitioners received up to \$25,000, minus their travel expenses to and from China, in exchange for their participation in the marriage fraud scheme.

Chinese beneficiaries paid to participate in the scheme to secure fraudulent entry into the U.S., the indictment alleges, and that the purported relationship between a petitioner and beneficiary was documented with “sham” evidence designed to give the appearance of a legitimate pre-marital relationship.

The indictment also alleges that if a beneficiary successfully made entry into the U.S., the petitioner and beneficiary would often participate in a civil marriage ceremony to cause issuance of a marriage license.

Most petitioners and beneficiaries would comply with the terms of the fraudulently-obtained visa by gaining legal status for the sham marriage, the indictment alleges. The indictment also alleges that neither before nor after the marriage license was issued did the petitioner and beneficiary enter into a bona fide marital relationship.

If convicted, the 43 defendants each face a potential maximum penalty of five years in prison on the conspiracy count, five years on the aiding and abetting marriage count, and 10 years on the aiding and abetting visa fraud count. All sentences are determined by a federal district court judge.

This case is the result of an investigation by ICE-Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force, which includes the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service and the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys LeeAnn K. Bell and David M. Genrich.

An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by the defendant. The defendant, of course, is presumed innocent until he or she pleads guilty or is proven guilty at trial.